

The Holy Icon as an Asset

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Today Byzantine icons are objects of great value. They are expensive because of their beauty and age. All too often the primary reason for their existence is forgotten. In what follows, I will examine the icon during the middle and late Byzantine period, that is, after the end of Iconoclasm. In fact, the existing documentation will force me to speak mainly of the eleventh to fifteenth century; and its paucity will compel me to consider these four centuries as a unit without trying to establish any periodization. The first part will study ordinary icons, those that did not have any special qualities nor perform any miracles. The second will concentrate on special icons, whose value depended on their alleged powers.

I. ORDINARY ICONS

The vast majority of Byzantine icons were ordinary ones. Were they assets for those who owned them, and how important were they as assets? First, the obvious: for the Byzantines, icons were not antiques. Moreover, antiquarian tastes and related expenses are of more recent vintage, beginning with the Renaissance. The Byzantines tended to replace old things with new ones as soon as they thought the time had come. For an icon, this usually meant as soon as it was damaged or worn.

The nature of the icon was discussed by theologians of the iconoclastic period, who wrote long dissertations on the subject. Others, like St. Paul of Latros, put it very simply: icons intervene in order to implore God's benefaction.¹

All authors agree that the prototype of the image is venerated, not the image itself. To be effective, an icon should be an authentic representation of the saint depicted. Physical likeness to the prototype remained its basic characteristic throughout the Byzantine period. This is clear in the lives of saints, whose authors go to great lengths to prove

that the saint's icon was an authentic portrait easily recognizable to any beholder.² The existence of an authentic icon, whether it be merely an image painted above the saint's grave³ or within his monastery,⁴ is often seen as a prerequisite of real sainthood. In fourteenth-century Cyprus, the cult of the monk Sabas took root when people painted his icon on a board, placed it in their houses, and lit candles before it.⁵

There are even cases where an icon was contested. In the eleventh century Symeon the New Theologian, in his effort to sanctify his spiritual father, Symeon of Stoudion, wrote his biography and several hymns, and had his image painted. The sanctification was contested by some, and the affair ended up in the patriarchal court. After much debate, the solution adopted was to erase the words ὁ ἅγιος (the saint) from the icon.⁶ The story is instructive in that the essential difference between the icon of a saint and the portrait of an individual resided mainly in the inscription. Thus the icon was seen simply as a portrait.

As such, the icon could easily be replaced by a copy. If the image was damaged, its likeness to the prototype was lost. Consequently, according to some iconophiles, a damaged image should be destroyed.⁷ This ability to be replaced also influenced

²Cf. K. Mentzou-Meimari, 'Απεικονίσεις δημοφιλῶν ἁγίων, in 'Η Καθημερινὴ ζωὴ στὸ Βυζάντιο, Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Center of Byzantine Studies (Athens, 1989), 587–602 and C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), 210–14. The question has been examined in depth by G. Dagron, "Holy Images and Likeness," above, pp. 23–33.

³E.g., A.-M. Talbot, *Faith Healing in Byzantium* (Brookline, Mass., 1983), 80; A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Μανρωτογράφειος Βιβλιοθήκη. Ἀνέκδοτα Ἑλληνικά* (Constantinople, 1884), 58.

⁴E.g., PG 99, col. 313.

⁵A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, 'Ανάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας, V (St. Petersburg, 1888), 240.

⁶*Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien par Nicéas Stéthatos*, ed. I. Hausherr (Rome, 1928), 98, 108, 121–22, 126, 130, etc.

⁷Cf. K. Parry, "Theodore Studites and the Patriarch Nicephorus on Image-Making as a Christian Imperative," *Byzantion* 59 (1989), 164–83, esp. 181.

¹Διαθήκη Παύλου τοῦ Λατρηνοῦ, Νέος Ἑλλ 12 (1915), 200.

its price: an object that can easily be replaced by a copy will not gain value over time and thus command a high price, all the more so because it was generally perceived as a utilitarian cult object, not as a work of art to be preserved for its own sake.

How were these copies made? There is a clear description of this in the life of St. Christopher of Calabria (10th century). The biographer stresses how the saint inspired the young monks: they copied the beauty of Christopher's virtue just as "painters make the faces of the images by looking at the old pictures."⁸ In other words, most icons had to be copies of earlier ones. If the copies were accurate, they could easily replace their prototype. The life of Athanasios the Athonite provides an eloquent example of how easily even a devout monk would allow his original icon to be replaced by a copy.⁹

Another text, a half century later, adds significant information. Michael Psellos, "the greatest scholar and the clearest thinker of his day," according to G. Ostrogorsky, had apparently sent several presents to an unnamed metropolitan of Chalkedon, but for some reason the metropolitan kept refusing them. Finally Psellos sent him an icon, which he also refused. Psellos thereupon wrote the following short letter.

To the Metropolitan of Chalkedon

Not even icons? Why, my most sacred lord? By your holy soul, I robbed some from churches and stole them from sanctuaries; I hid them under my garment and escaped. When I was held in suspicion, I simply swore not to do it again. But I cling to these faint pictures, because they show the art of the painter. I have a collection of such boards (σανίδων); they are mostly without gold or silver, like these new senators, who have no crosses and no purple garments. When I give them [i.e., the icons] away, I feel no pain.¹⁰

This letter was written in the middle of the eleventh century, after Emperor Constantine IX Mon-

omachos had opened the senate for the first time to large segments of the population, presumably by bestowing honorific titles on the members of the Constantinopolitan bureaucracy.¹¹ Consequently, Psellos is here referring with sarcasm to these parvenus who, although senators, were not given the right (or could not afford) to wear the traditional insignia of senators, jeweled crosses and purple garments.

An icon, then, should normally be covered with a gold or silver revetment.¹² But Psellos also appreciated the art of the painter. It was because of this art that Psellos removed the icons from sanctuaries and assembled his collection. The notion of stealing icons from isolated churches in order to create an art collection is very modern, yet it dates from the eleventh century. Obviously something was wrong with Psellos' behavior, but the value of the icons involved was low and there was no real victim—only some vague ecclesiastical authorities, who were probably satisfied with Psellos' promise that he would not do it again.

Psellos' attitude is also modern: he was interested in art and collecting but does not mention the alleged religious value of the icons or the spiritual benefits that one might obtain from them. He considers them merely boards and recognizes that if some objective value was to be attributed to them, they should have gold or silver revetments. It is clear that most of his contemporaries did not share his attitudes. Yet it is interesting to note that this "modern" view of art appears in eleventh-century Byzantium, at the same time that we encounter the first amateur artists.¹³

All authors insist on the objective value that the icon acquires when decorated with gold and silver revetment (χρυσόαργυρον), or occasionally with pearls and stones, but aesthetic considerations are also present. A fairly common one is that the image is so realistic that it is almost breathing.¹⁴ Others, less simplistic, speak of painters who render not only the likeness of their model but also his spiritual values. For example, in the eleventh century, Christopher of Mytilene speaks of a painter who also displayed on his image "the virtues" of his

⁸I. Cozza-Luzi, *Historia et laudes SS. Sabae et Macarii iuniorum et Sicilia auctore Oreste patriarcha Hierosolymitano* (Rome, 1893), 84: καθάπερ γὰρ οἱ ζωγράφοι εἰς τοὺς παλαιοὺς χαρακτῆρας ἀνεύζοντες τὰς μορφὰς τῶν εἰκόνων ἐπιτελοῦσιν.

⁹*Vitae duae antiquae Sancti Athanasii athonitae*, ed. J. Noret (Louvain, 1982), 122–23.

¹⁰*Michaelis Pselli Scripta Minora*, ed. E. Kurtz and F. Drexler, II (Milan, 1941), 152, no. 129: Οὐδὲ εἰκόνας; καὶ διὰ τί, ὁ θειότατος τῷ ὄντι δεσπότης μου; ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ ἱεροσυνῶ ταῦτας νῆ τὴν ἱεράν σου ψυχὴν. καὶ κέκλωφά γε πολλὰς ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδύτων καὶ ὑπαγκάλισάμενος τότε μὲν διέλαθον, ὕστερον δὲ ὑποπτευθεὶς αὐτίκα ἀπωμοσάμην. προστέτηκα δὲ μᾶλλον ταῖς ἀμυδραῖς ταύταις γραφαῖς, ὅτι τὴν τέχνην τοῦ γραφέως ἐξεύκονίζουσι. καὶ μοι συνήκται τοιαῦτα σανίδια, πλείω ἄχρυσα καὶ ἀνάργυρα, ὥσπερ ἔνιοι τῶν νέων συγκλητικῶν ἀσταυροὶ τε καὶ ἄβλαττοι, ἐγὼ δὲ διδοὺς οὐκ ἄλγῶ.

¹¹P. Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XI^e siècle byzantin* (Paris, 1977), 290.

¹²On these revetments see A. Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du Moyen Age* (Venice, 1975).

¹³N. Oikonomides, "L'artiste-amateur à Byzance," in *Artistes, artisans et production artistique au Moyen Age*, ed. X. Barral y Altet, I (Paris, 1986), 45–51.

¹⁴*Manuelis Philae Carmina*, ed. E. Miller, I–II (Paris, 1855–57), I, 307, 318.

model;¹⁵ in the twelfth century several authors referred to the extraordinarily beautiful and expressive paintings of a master named Eulalios;¹⁶ and in the fourteenth century, Manuel Philes made a further effort to distinguish between two levels of art: "If art represents the likeness of bodies, this is painting, this is a natural thing; there is nothing extraordinary in representing matter with another [kind of] matter. But when the art shows the mind, and the flame, and shows at a glance the spirit and the light, then art is a marvel to be admired, stranger."¹⁷

In all these cases there is not the least indication that a better quality of painting would substantially influence the price of the icon. This may be assumed, but it is not directly stated. On the contrary, according to the Book of the Eparch (chap. 22, concerning the construction industry, which included painters), there were special measures taken against contractors who tried to increase their fees. The primary objective was to enforce a fair price. Any price exceeding double the amount of what was considered "fair" was automatically illegal and could not be claimed.

Another of Philes' poems addressed to the Virgin is of interest: "I am having you painted by the hand of the painter, for a small amount, which does not do justice [to the benefaction that I received from you]."¹⁸ This passage gives the distinct impression that the cost of having an image painted was relatively small—certainly compared to the cost of gold or silver revetment for the icon, which is often mentioned by Philes without ever being undervalued as a donor's gift to the saint. On the contrary, in Philes' poems the addition of *chrysargyron* to an icon is called a tax (φόρος), an offering (προσφορά), a decoration (κόσμος), or a reward for saving a person's life (σώστρον).¹⁹

This impression is reinforced by the single text that describes how a painter was commissioned to copy an icon—and a famous painter at that, Pantoleon. The question of expense did not arise, only

that of time, since Pantoleon was then working for the emperor.²⁰ In other words, painters, even famous ones, were mere craftsmen, like carpenters or plumbers. They were probably more busy than their colleagues and probably also more expensive than the average, but not by much.

In order to gain some idea of the value attributed to icons, one must examine various monastic lists of icons: monastic typika, brevia as well as acts of donation. Icons are described according to subject matter (the Virgin, the Crucifixion, etc.), then by size (the size of a shield, large, small, a bust [λαμίν], a standing image, etc.), form (diptychs), and finally materials or technique. It is always stressed if an icon is covered with gold or silver (i.e., "dressed," ἡμφιεσμένη), has a precious frame (περιφέρεια) or a halo made of gold (φεγγίον), or is decorated with precious stones. These are the "adorned icons" (κεκοσμημένοι), which have a value markedly superior to all others and are described in detail. As Ioli Kalavrezou has remarked, "the unadorned ones (ἀκόσμητοι) are usually placed at the end of the lists and may be described individually, or lumped together without distinction or omitted entirely. Precious materials define the category of adorned icons, their absence that of the unadorned ones."²¹ Sometimes it is emphasized that an icon was brought from another place, usually Constantinople²² or Rome,²³ obviously because this guaranteed its quality. However, nothing in these lists indicates an aesthetic classification that could influence the price of the icons. On this point the lists are silent, for icons are mentioned in more or less the same way as any other tools or utensils belonging to the monastery.

In the synodikon of the monastery of Ivron, in which 166 benefactors are mentioned from the late tenth to the late twelfth century, we find only one icon, that of St. Clement, obviously because it was a precious one. The other donations include money, land, jewelry, horses, mules, and books.²⁴ One mule mentioned in the synodikon sold for 17

¹⁵E. Kurtz, *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 75.

¹⁶Texts collected in Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 230–33.

¹⁷*Manuelis Philae Carmina*, I, 214: "Ἄν σωμάτων μίμησιν ἡ τέχνη γράφει / τοῦτο γραφικὴ, τοῦτο καὶ φύσιν ἔχον· / καινὸν γὰρ οὐδὲν ζωγραφεῖν ὕλην ὕλη. / Ὅταν δὲ καὶ νοῦν καὶ πυρὸς φλόγα γράφει, / καὶ πνεῦμα καὶ φῶς ἐν βραχεῖ περιγράφει, / τέρας βλέπων θαύμαζε τὴν τέχνην, ξένη.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, I, 67: χειρὶ σε λοιπὸν ζωγραφῶ σκιαγράφου / σμικρὰς ἀμοιβῆς οὐ καταλλήλου χάριν.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, I, 139 and II, 74, 355; II, 94; I, 215, 307, 308 and II, 146; I, 73, 78.

²⁰*Vitae duae . . . Athanasii*, 122, 212; cf. I. Sevčenko, "On Pantoleon the Painter," *Festschrift für Otto Demus zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Hunger and M. Restle (= *JÖB* 21 [1972]), 241–49.

²¹I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite* (Vienna, 1985), 73–79, esp. 75–76.

²²G. Theodorides, *Μία δόκη καὶ μία διαθήκη Βυζαντινῆ* (Thessaloniki, 1962), 20.

²³D. Papachryssanthou, "Un confesseur du Second Iconoclasm: La vie du patrice Nicétas (†836)," *TM* 3 (1968), 325.

²⁴A French translation of the essential paragraphs of the synodikon (by H. Metreveli) is included in *Actes d'Iviron*, II, ed. J. Lefort, N. Oikonomides, and D. Papachryssanthou (Paris, 1990), 4–11.

hyperpyra. Must we therefore assume that an icon was considerably cheaper than a mule?

I am afraid so. Here I am not speaking of very cheap icons that surely existed, such as the clay icons produced in Preslav.²⁵ I will not examine these objects, which hardly deserve the name of icons and for which I have no information to offer. Instead I will turn to the exact prices of icons belonging to an elite household of Thessaloniki, that of Manuel Deblitzenos, whose belongings, worth about a thousand hyperpyra, are enumerated in a document of 1384.²⁶

This document provides objective evaluations of icons along with all the other contents of the household, prepared by a group of experts. The icons were decorated (but without any precious stones: only one has *ὕελία*), and their prices varied: one was worth 7 hyperpyra,²⁷ one 6 hyperpyra, one 5, three 4 hyperpyra and one just 2 hyperpyra; 4 hyperpyra is the most common price with variants. Of course, we know nothing about the dimensions of these objects, but since they contained at least two descents from the cross, that is, scenes involving several persons, they may not have been especially small. As this was a rather wealthy household, we may also assume that they were of fairly good quality.

If we compare these prices to those of other items contained in the same document, what may we conclude? A kettle (*κακκάβιον*) is valued at 2 hyperpyra, as is a towel (*σάβανον*) or a cheap, worn-out blanket. Used sleeping gear, mattresses and blankets, are valued at 4 hyperpyra, while 6 hyperpyra is the price of used silk blankets and 7 of an old bedcover of fox fur. But the same list mentions a horse worth 14 hyperpyra, and a very good silk blanket worth up to 32 hyperpyra. Deblitzenos' cheapest icon was worth as much as a kettle or a towel, while his most expensive one was valued at half a horse or one-quarter of a first-quality silk blanket. If such were the prices, one can understand why donations of icons were con-

sidered not worth mentioning in a monastery's synodikon.

Yet icons had some value, by no means negligible for the average Byzantine, who did not possess much more than a kettle or a blanket. These figures, between 2 and 7 hyperpyra, should be compared to the average tax paid each year by a paroikos (1 hyperpyron), the yearly salary of a priest (6 hyperpyra; see below, note 48), or the yearly revenue of a pronoiarios like Deblitzenos (ca. 70–80 hyperpyra). Thus a seasoned monk, like St. Lazaros of Mount Galesion,²⁸ forbade his subordinates to keep icons in their cells because this constituted property and contradicted their monastic vows (*πρὸς ἀκτημοσύνην ἐνάγων*). There were icons in all lay households, and, according to a custom attested for thirteenth-century Asia Minor, they were mentioned first in all marriage contracts as part of the dowry.²⁹ In the eleventh century some owners of icons sold them at markets.³⁰ Nikephoros Gregoras describes how the Turks, after taking Nicaea, brought some icons, together with books and relics, and sold them in Constantinople³¹—but in this case we may assume that the buyers were also motivated by a desire to avoid having the icons desecrated by the infidels.

Icons could be mortgaged, as happened shortly before 1400 in order to guarantee a loan of 110 hyperpyra (these undoubtedly were several richly decorated icons).³² They were liable to be stolen for their value, as is mentioned in astrological texts,³³ but one suspects that the thieves were interested mainly in their revetments.

This was the case in 1365, when a priest, pressed by hunger—he and his wife and children had not eaten for three days—removed the golden halo of the icon of the Virgin of his church and sold it in order to buy some food.³⁴ He was deposed for having committed sacrilege. A similar case occurred in

²⁵ T. Totev, "L'atelier de céramique peinte du monastère royal de Preslav," *CahArch* 35 (1987), 73 ff.

²⁶ *Actes de Docheiariou*, ed. N. Oikonomides (Paris, 1984), no. 49. The contents of this household were analyzed in my article "The Contents of the Byzantine House from the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Century," *DOP* 44 (1990), 206–7.

²⁷ Prof. A. Laiou informs me that an icon is also valued at 7 nomismata in a poorly edited early 13th-century judicial decision of the archbishop of Ohrid, Demetrios Chomatianos; see *Analecta sacra et classica spicilegio solesmensi parata*, VI, ed. J. Pitra (Paris-Rome, 1891), no. 84.

²⁸ *ActaSS*, Nov. III, 548.

²⁹ Georges Pachymérès, *Relations historiques*, I, ed. A. Failler (Paris, 1984), 187.

³⁰ *Vie de Syméon*, 226.

³¹ Nikephoros Gregoras, *Historiae byzantinae*, Bonn ed., IX.13: I, 458: "Ἐν τούτῳ τῷ χρόνῳ καὶ Νίκαιαν εἶλον οἱ βάρβαροι, τὸ μέγα καὶ περιβόητον ἄστὴν λιμῷ καὶ στρατῷ πολιορκηθεῖσαν. καὶ πολλὰς τῶν ἐκεῖσε θεῶν εἰκόνων καὶ βιβλίων ἐς Βυζάντιον κομίσαντες, καὶ ἁγίων γυναικῶν λείψανα δύο, χρήμασιν ἥλλαξαντο."

³² F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi* (Vienna, 1860–90), II, 565 (hereafter MM).

³³ *Catalogus codicum astrologorum graecorum*, I. Codices florentini nosc. A. Olivieri (Brussels, 1898), 97.

³⁴ MM, I, 475.

1370, when a monk burglarized a house, found a “decorated” icon of St. John the Baptist, removed and kept the revetment, then threw the icon away in a corner of a church.³⁵ Again, in 1394, another thief destroyed (καταλύσαντος) the icon of the Virgin Therapeiotissa in order to sell the silver of the revetment.³⁶ In all these cases, the interest in the icon itself is markedly limited. The same thing had already happened two centuries earlier.³⁷

Icons were also the object of quarrels. In many cases, it is not clear what the motivation was: spiritual or material greed? When, during an earthquake, the fresco image of the Virgin with the archangel Gabriel (i.e., the Annunciation) fell from the apse of the church of the Virgin tes Peges without breaking, the magistrissa Helen Artabasina, inspired by the marvel, took it to her house and provided the icon with all due honor in spite of the clerics’ protest; finally, thanks to the intervention of the Virgin, the image was returned and placed to the right of the sanctuary where, we are told, it began to perform numerous healings.³⁸

Christopher of Mytilene (early 11th century) addressed a poem to an unknown synkellos, possibly a relative of Emperor Romanos III, who lived in an elite section of the city called Kynegion. Christopher, who lived in the middle-class quarter of Strategion, wrote the poem on behalf of all the inhabitants of his neighborhood requesting that the icon of St. Cyrus, which had been removed from their church and was then kept in the house of Argypoulos, be returned where it initially belonged. The poem, poorly preserved, does not provide information about the reasons motivating this request other than that the icon would feel much better if it returned home and that this would enhance the spiritual and material well-being of the neighborhood. Here again an icon, snatched away by a powerful man of the aristocracy, is claimed back by its usual and rightful worshippers.³⁹

Much later, in 1392, the children of a certain Kondyles turned against the Athonite monastery of Lavra, claiming rights of property over an icon of the Virgin called the Serbouniotissa. Here again

we know nothing beyond the fact that they claimed hereditary rights over the icon and were rebuked because they had not respected the statute of limitations.⁴⁰

To sum up: an ordinary icon was an asset of some value, certainly not excessive, depending on its size and, above all, on the materials used for its decoration.⁴¹

II. SPECIAL ICONS

A miracle-working icon was the glory of the church in which it was kept, the protector of those who had faith in it: the Virgin of the Blachernai, of the Chalkoprateia, the Virgin Hodegetria. There were many other minor ones, such as the icon of Christ that perspired milk⁴² or that of St. Spyridon, which, when left in the dark, asked the monks for a candle; or the icon of the Virgin that revealed the name of a thief.⁴³ One may mention the ninth-century monk Eustratios whose monastic skevophylakion was burglarized and who, instead of going to the police, went straight to an icon of St. Theodore and boldly declared to the saint (μετὰ παρρησίας) that he had better reveal who the thief was, or the monks would never again light a candle before him—the revelation came forth at once.⁴⁴

A wonder-working icon—or one that was reputed to be—could provide its owner with income, in proportion to its fame and accessibility. A good example is found in the typikon of the monastery of Pantokrator of 1136. Its author, Emperor John Komnenos, made special provisions concerning his future commemorations and those of his wife, who were both to be buried in the monastery:

I wish that, on the day of our commemorations, the divine icon of the Virgin Hodegetria be brought [from the palace, where it was kept] to the monastery of Pantokrator and stay there for the services . . . when they [i.e., the icon’s retinue] leave, they should receive 50 hyperpyra nomismata to be distributed as follows: 6 nomismata to the icon, 2 nomismata to each

³⁵ Ibid., 538–39.

³⁶ Ibid., II, 203.

³⁷ Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, Bonn ed., I, 453: καὶ κόσμους ἀπορραγῆναι ἁγίων εἰκασίων.

³⁸ *Acta SS*, Nov. III, 882–83.

³⁹ Kurtz, ed., *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios*, no. 68. Cf. N. Oikonomides, “Life and Society in Eleventh Century Constantinople,” *SüdostF* 49 (1990), 11–12.

⁴⁰ *Actes de Lavra*, III, ed. P. Lemerle, A. Guillou, N. Svoronos, and D. Papachryssanthou (Paris, 1979), no. 152.

⁴¹ It is unfortunate that for Byzantium we have no precise archival information such as that on Venetian Crete. See, e.g., M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “Taste and the Market of Cretan Icons in the 15th and 16th Centuries,” in *From Byzantium to El Greco* (London, 1987), 51–53.

⁴² *La vie merveilleuse de Saint Pierre d’Atroa*, ed. V. Laurent (Brussels, 1956), 101–3.

⁴³ *Acta SS*, Nov. IV, 635, 638.

⁴⁴ *Ανάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, IV, 388.

of the 12 groups of followers (κοῦδαι),⁴⁵ 2 nomismata for the porters and other servants of the icon, and the rest for banners [or: processional icons] accompanying the procession.⁴⁶

These are considerable amounts of money. It is noteworthy that the amount corresponding to the price of a new icon, 6 nomismata, went to the monastery ton Hodegon, where the Hodegetria belonged, but a much larger amount was distributed to the people who surrounded and honored it. This provided incentives for being attached to and serving a distinguished icon.

It seems clear that we have here a religious confraternity—and in fact the existence of such a religious confraternity of the Virgin Hodegetria, which strove to promote its veneration by carrying it through the streets of Constantinople, is attested by Clavijo and Pero Tafur in the fifteenth century. Other such confraternities are also attested, the best known of which is that of the Virgin Naupaktitissa of Thebes; its regulations, preserved in the Cappella Palatina of Palermo, have been published recently.⁴⁷ They were signed by its members (including three women) who declare that they were the “slaves” of the Virgin Naupaktitissa. The entire group was to meet the first day of each month and transport the icon in procession, with chanting, from the church where it was currently installed to another church, prepared by one of the members. The icon was to spend the next month in the new church in the care of the above member. The procedure was repeated each month, and the veneration of the icon was promoted, while obviously some revenues were generated for the icon itself (i.e., its owner, the nunnery of the Naupaktitissai) as well as for the members of the confraternity, who formed its contingent of followers and cared for it. We cannot describe these revenues exactly,

but the example of the Pantokrator gives us some idea, provided that we keep in mind the difference between the two icons, the two cities, and the two social levels. Moreover, confraternities provided their members with spiritual gratification and with improved social standing; recruitment must not have been a problem for them. The matter becomes clearer in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for which we have several decisions of the patriarchal tribunal.

Case no. 1: An icon replaced by a copy

In the early fourteenth century, the nun Euphrosyne from the Peloponnese had inherited, together with (her brother?), the bishop of Kernitza, Malotaras (from an important Lakedaimonian family), an icon of the Virgin Hodegetria. This was obviously a copy, because the original Hodegetria never left Constantinople; but it was recognized as a valuable copy, which means that there must have been an agreement with the owners of the original. The two owners of the icon shared its revenues (πρόσοδοι) as well as the produce of the fields that were donated to it. Then problems arose. First the bishop, then his superior, the metropolitan of Lakedaimonia, tried to take the icon away from the nun, who went to court, won her case, and had her right to draw half the revenues of the icon confirmed. She then obtained the help and support of the governor (κεφαλὴ) of the Peloponnese, Andronikos Palaiologos Asanes, and built a church of the Virgin Hodegetria (other than that of Mistras), placed the icon in it, and hired priests for the services.⁴⁸ She collected the revenues. Then the metropolitan of (Patras, proedros of) Lakedaimonia, took the icon away (without touching the church) and kept it in his house. In April 1316 the patriarchal tribunal decided that the icon should return to her church and that Euphrosyne was authorized to draw half the revenues, the other half going to the successors of the late bishop Malotaras, undoubtedly the ecclesiastical authorities.⁴⁹ We note that the icon's revenues included donations in cash or in kind as well as the income from tracts of land that were donated to the icon—before the building of its church, as if the icon constituted by itself a legal person, able to receive donations of real estate.

⁴⁵ The term is also attested in the Greek portolans: E. Kriaras, *Λεξικὸν τῆς μεσαιωνικῆς ἐλληνικῆς δημώδους γραμματείας* 1100–1669, VIII (Thessaloniki, 1982), 314. It comes from the Latin *cauda* / Italian *coda*, meaning “tail,” “train” (of a dress), or “retinue.” In the context of the typikon of the Pantokrator (and considering that 2 nomismata were too large an amount to be given to one person), I understand it as indicating organized groups of followers that were part of the icon's retinue.

⁴⁶ P. Gautier, “Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantokrator,” *REB* 32 (1974), 81–83. The word *signa* was translated as “banners” by Gautier, while Nancy Ševčenko (below, p. 46) suggests that it could well indicate (other) processional icons.

⁴⁷ J. Nesbitt and J. Wiita, “A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era,” *BZ* 69 (1975), 360–84, which also includes information on all other known Byzantine confraternities, such as that of the Hodegetria, the activities of which have been partly reexamined by G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, D.C., 1984), 362–66.

⁴⁸ A priest's salary in Constantinople in 1324 was estimated at 6 hyperpyra a year: MM, I, 110; J. Darrouzès, *Les registres des actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, I, 5 (Paris, 1977), no. 2116.

⁴⁹ MM, I, 52–53 (= ed. Hunger-Kresten, no. 35); Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 2064.

Case no. 2: Business associations for the purpose of exploiting an icon

In 1321 a monk named Nikandros obtained from the abbot of the monastery of the Resurrection, with the agreement of its founder, the grand logothete (Constantine Akropolites), a piece of land in Constantinople; he agreed to build a church and some monastic kellia at his own expense and install in the church the coffin of St. John Katasabbas (i.e., John of Mar Sabas) and the icon of the great martyr and trophy bearer George the Katabiotes (this was obviously the name of the icon), which were to be given to him by the monastery. He would be obliged to pay 10 hyperpyra on taking possession of the land and from then on a yearly rent of 3½ hyperpyra. It is obvious that this new church, equipped with a relic and an icon of reputation, was expected to generate a considerable revenue that would cover all these expenses, and generate a further revenue for Nikandros in his lifetime. So much so that the works began right away and the church was about to start functioning when the founder of the monastery changed his mind (presumably because he felt that the arrangement was not quite honorable), vehemently disapproved of the agreement, and ordered it rescinded. The new church was torn down, with Nikandros receiving compensation for the expenses that he incurred.⁵⁰

There was a similar case shortly before 1400. Anna Aspietissa, the owner of a church in Constantinople, obtained from her cousin a piece of land next to the church on the understanding that she would build some kellia there, then bring an icon of the Virgin Mangouriotissa to the church. The icon was to become a *proskynema*, that is, an object of adoration. Here again an income was expected, but this was conditional on the institution's having the appearance of a monastery, hence the need for kellia.⁵¹

Case no. 3

This case, from Constantinople in 1401, involved the revenues from a *proskynema* (icon) and limitations on the property rights over it. A brother and a sister named Gabras had inherited an icon of the Virgin called Koubouklaraia, which

was a famous *proskynema*. It passed from one generation to the next in succession, and special provisions were made in order to regulate the distribution of its revenues. The income produced by pious offerings (ἀναθήματα) were to be divided into three parts: one would go to the church where the icon stood, while the other two would go to the two lawful heirs. On the other hand, half the income produced by (specially commissioned) services and prayers (λειτουργιών καὶ παρακλήσεων) and by (the sale of) oil and (of) candles should go to the priest who was serving in the church, while the other half should go to the above-mentioned heirs.

This happened at a time when Constantinople had already been blockaded by the Ottomans for some years. Famine was becoming a problem, and many of the city's inhabitants tried to abandon it in order to find a better life in Ottoman lands. One of the co-owners of the icon, Gabraina, tried to flee the city. She was caught and was obliged to leave the icon behind, since the exportation of such a *proskynema* was forbidden. The icon went to the priest Gabras, who was then obliged to give Emperor Manuel II a deposit of 300 hyperpyra in cash as a guarantee that the *proskynema* would not be exported. When Gabras also decided to flee the city, the icon returned to the emperor and ended up in the hands of the archon Manuel Boullotes, who also paid a deposit of 200 hyperpyra and undertook the obligation to safeguard it. It was placed in another church, with Boullotes drawing the revenues. The patriarchal tribunal decided in July 1401 that the icon should stay put (in the church where Boullotes had placed it) pending the return of Manuel II from western Europe, and that the Gabras heirs should be authorized to collect their shares of the revenue, except for one-third of the "pious offerings" that should go to the church in which the icon was initially placed by the Gabras family, and one-half of the "prayers and candles revenue," which should go to the priest serving the icon in the church where it was currently located.⁵² In other words, the arrangement concerning the distribution of the revenue was repeated with one difference, that the share (one-third of donations) earmarked for the church went to the initial church (which was obviously considered to have acquired rights over the icon) and not to the church where the icon effectively was in July

⁵⁰ MM, I, 102–4 (= ed. Hunger-Kresten, no. 73); Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 2110. For the monastery of the Resurrection see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, I: 3. *Les églises et les monastères* (Paris, 1969), 20–22.

⁵¹ MM, II, 404–5; Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 3142.

⁵² MM, II, 513–15; Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 3219.

1401 and was expected to stay for sometime longer.

This story is full of details concerning the nature of the revenues that an icon could generate: donations, cash payments for prayers, sale of cult materials. We have seen that half the anticipated revenue of services and candles would have been enough to cover at least part of the expenses of a priest, probably including his family. The shares of the two heirs must have been fairly high, and one notes the existence of a third share going to the church offering its hospitality to the icon: a type of rent.

We also learn approximately what its objective value was thought to be: the security payment varied between 200 and 300 hyperpyra, depending on the reliability of the guarantor. This was a large amount of money and obviously did not compare with the prices of 2–7 hyperpyra for the ordinary icons mentioned above.

Revenues from famous icons, such as the Hod-egetria or the Blachernitissa, were clearly far more important than those described here. This document of 1401 speaks of the value and amount of revenues, from the lower- and middle-class faithful, that could be generated by an otherwise unknown icon.

Case no. 4

The revenues of a miraculous icon can be transferred in order to keep its veneration active. A proskynema was normally expected to generate a certain amount of revenue, as long as it was taken care of, and was thus liable to be the object of a donation. In May 1394 the patriarch gave to a certain Kydones, protonotarios of Christoupolis (Kavalla), who lived (as a refugee) in Xantheia (Xanthe), the proskynema of St. George in that city, together with its revenue, in order to administer it and take care of it (μετὰ τοῦ εἰσοδήματος αὐτοῦ χάριν προμηθείας καὶ κυβερνήσεως αὐτοῦ).⁵³ This was obviously one of the patriarchate's assets in Ottoman territory. The patriarchate could

no longer manage and exploit it directly; thus it was ceded to a refugee cleric, who could not possibly claim any rights over it: in this way, the proskynema would continue to function regularly in its normal milieu, while supporting the cleric in those difficult years.

A final word concerning the oil that would constitute a source of revenue for the icon. It is not clear what is meant here. Was it oil for the lamps, the καντήλια that were supposed to burn in front of the icon? This is possible—in fact very likely. But there are other possibilities. I cite an example based on a seal in the Whittemore collection.⁵⁴ It shows another possible usage of the icon to promote other religious and devotional items.

This is a 25-mm lead seal of the twelfth century with breaks at both ends of the channel and a suspension hole close to the top. On one side is the bust of St. Sophia, one of the wonder-working saints of this name,⁵⁵ inscribed [Ἡ ἁγία] Σοφία. On the other side is the inscription Ἀγία Σοφία β(οή)θ(ει) τὸν ἔχοντά το. “St. Sophia, help the one who bears it,” that is, the seal. It is clear that this specimen was used to seal something: this can be seen from the breaks at both ends of the channel. Yet it has from the very beginning been conceived as a talisman (note the inscription) and has also been used as such (note the suspension hole on top). A possible interpretation would be that the present specimen comes from a sanctuary distributing (or selling) an object of piety (e.g., *myron*, or oil, dust from the tomb, or the like) in sealed packages or bottles; their contents were guaranteed by this seal which, once removed, could also serve as a talisman—not a bad combination. The icon of the saint, represented on the seal, was a basic element guaranteeing the individual's protection as well as the authenticity of the product.

What made the difference between an ordinary icon and a special one? We have the confession of the famous impostor Paul Tagaris, who was active in Constantinople sometime before 1363. Being a simple monk, “he found an icon which, he claimed to all, possessed miraculous properties, and tried to make a living out of it; he appointed himself as the icon's sacristan, and performed unseemly acts just to show off” (this could presumably be a reference to bogus wonder-working). But his relatives considered that his activities brought shame on the whole family, and denounced him to the patri-

⁵³ MM, II, 204: Μηνὶ μαῖω ἰνδ. β' ἔδωθη πρὸς τὸν πρωτονοτάριον Χριστουπόλεως, τὸν Κυδώνην, εὐρισκόμενον εἰς τὴν Ξάνθειαν, τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ προσκύνημα τοῦ ἁγίου μου μεγαλομάρτυρος Γεωργίου, ὡς ἂν κατέχη αὐτὸ μετὰ τοῦ εἰσοδήματος αὐτοῦ χάριν προμηθείας καὶ κυβερνήσεως αὐτοῦ. διὰ τοῦτο ἐσημειώθη καὶ τοῦτο ἐνταῦθα δι' ἀσφάλειαν. Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 2957. Another interpretation of the closing phrase is also possible: “in order to take care (προμηθεῖας) and to support (κυβερνήσεως) him [i.e., the protonotarios].” Neither translation substantially changes the practical implications of the whole arrangement.

⁵⁴ Fogg Art Museum, no. 1257.

⁵⁵ *Synaxarium CP*, index, s.v.

arch.⁵⁶ In the end, the icon was forcibly taken from him, and the impostor chose to flee abroad. As in the case of the monk Nikandros mentioned above, here again it was laymen who objected as soon as they realized that the icon was being used in a way not befitting its holiness.

Be that as it may, it remains that in order to have a special icon one should first of all make sure that the public was informed of its existence and its qualities. The owner also had to attract and maintain the public's interest. The activities described above call to mind some very modern sales techniques. I will therefore have to make use of the vocabulary of contemporary marketing and run the risk of sounding disrespectful. In what follows the icon will be the product to be sold and the faithful, especially laymen, the potential customers.

Trademark. We have seen that uniqueness and authenticity was not a prerequisite for a "special" icon: the Virgin Hodegetria of Constantinople was reputed to be the work of Luke the Evangelist, but its copy fared quite well in the Peloponnese, under a "franchise." Hence, it was paramount for the icon to have a special name that functioned like a trademark. This is obvious for the Peloponnesian Hodegetria. But all the other special icons had their own names: the Virgin Naupaktitissa, Man-gouriotissa, Koubouklaraia, St. George Katabiotes.

Property rights. These seem to have been generally well recognized and protected. But as "special icons" were also of public concern, they were constantly supervised (if not directly coveted) by the authorities, the church and, to a lesser degree, the state. In any case, they could not be disposed of as freely as other pieces of movable property.

Customer satisfaction. For this the icon had to be (and was) provided with all the necessities and with decent service: a priest, minor cult objects, a confraternity, etc. Quality control was possible for all this, as various kinds of arrangements could be envisioned: for example, the priest could be salaried or be an associate, receiving a fixed percentage of the profits. Of course, wonder-working would cer-

tainly have been the best service, but this could by no means be guaranteed. Impostors could possibly have tried to force things in this direction but such activities, if known, created hostile reactions, mainly among the potential customers.

Targeting potential customers. It is obvious that the Virgin Hodegetria of Constantinople had a different public from, say, the Virgin Koubouklaraia. The Hodegetria attracted the emperor and aristocracy, had its own dwelling, and was accompanied by all the glamour that such a situation required. The other minor proskynemata attracted the man in the street and could function even from rented premises.

Investment. Necessary, to improve business. A private church would add to the icon's reputation and improve profitability by eliminating rents. Some monastic cells would create the right mood for the customers. Moreover, a monastery, being a stable institution, would encourage donations in real estate, which, as we have seen, was not at all impossible even when the "special" icon was simply the property of an individual. In order to put together the necessary funds, donations could be attracted (Andronikos Palaiologos Asanes in the Peloponnese) or business associations be instituted, based on the principle of profit-sharing or on the basis of leasing.

Research and development. This can be seen mainly in the activities of impostors. But we also find some honest faithful, who try to obtain an official copy of a known wonder-working icon. This is the case of the Virgin Hodegetria in the Peloponnese, which ended up by creating a new market, based on the principle of concession of rights.

Distribution. Creation of new outlets in order to reach a larger number of customers is envisaged. This is the franchise obtained by the monk Nikandros in 1321 and, most of all, the case of the Virgin Naupaktitissa, which changed her residence in the town every month, thus becoming accessible to all the parishes in Thebes, and reaching more women, who statistically spend more than men.

Demonstration. The icon is placed in a church, in a special position, where it can constantly be seen by the public during regular services, in which it may be mentioned. This would attract the devout public's attention, hold its interest, and increase its desire for the icon.

Continuity. A constant and relentless effort was necessary in order to keep up (and, hopefully improve) the status of a special icon. Any prolonged neglect or withdrawal from activity could only give

⁵⁶MM, II, 225–26: εἰκόνα γὰρ τινα θεῖαν εὐρὼν καὶ θαυματουργὸν αὐτὴν εἶναι τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀνακηρύξας, πόρον τινὰ ζωῆς δι' αὐτῆς συνάγειν διενόηθην. νεωκόρος δὲ αὐτῆς ἀποκαταστάς καὶ τινα τῶν μὴ προσηκόντων πρὸς ἐπίδειξιν ματαίαν ποιοῦμενος. . . . Cf. Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 2974 and D. Nicol, "The Confessions of a Bogus Patriarch: Paul Tagaris Palaiologos, Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem and Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople in the Fourteenth Century," *JEH* 21.4 (1970), 289–99.

way to competition and initiate decline, as the “special” character of the icon would fade away, and its estimated value would diminish dramatically. The importance of continuous presence on the market is clear in the case of the proskynema of Xantheia.

Advertising and sales promotions. This was based on the principle of repetition and follow-up, large-scale advertising being limited to large concerns. Its success was possible because of the creation of a large group of highly motivated agents, the members of the confraternities. It was conceived with short-term, mid-term, and long-term strategies.

(a) Short-term. Special events (i.e., processions, etc.) publicize the icon, keep alive its reputation, and constitute an immediate invitation to custom-

ers. Religious confraternities played a crucial role in this respect.

(b) Mid-term. The members of the confraternities would presumably speak privately about the icon to which they were dedicated. Thus they would reach the public more directly, door-to-door, so to speak, even after the sensation created by the procession was forgotten. Most important, they could also fend off competition.

(c) Long-term. A talisman that the customer could hang from his neck would make him feel safer in the future; he would carry it around for the rest of his life, and so keep alive the memory of the icon for himself and for others. This could encourage further visits and further business.

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